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ABSTRACT

Recent work by both neoclassical and political economists suggests the scope of the influence of economic structures on rural socioeconomic conditions and rural education. In particular, dual labor-market analyses look beneath the surface of the macroeconomy--the national economy--to the underlying reality of regional or sectoral economic structures. According to Jane Jacobs' economic critiques, macroeconomic analysis in large nations or empires obscures the importance of local structures and processes. Rural areas render specialized service to the national economy by serving as sites for specialized production of marginal enterprises including energy, minerals, food, and simple manufactured goods. A frequently endorsed strategy for rural development is the improvement of human capital in rural areas through education and training. This strategy is of questionable value as the socially created structures that govern the macroeconomy appear to require the economic marginality of rural areas. Rural schools that aim only to develop students' human capital are preparing them to accept the increasingly marginal role reserved for rural areas by the American macroeconomy. Schools can not directly change the social and economic structures in which they are embedded. Their mission, rather, should be to equip students with an intimate knowledge of their culture and with the tools of judgment and reason. This paper contain 68 references. (SV)

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Jane Jacobs and the Dilemma of Life and Learning in Rural Areas

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Jane Jacobs and the Dilemma of Life and Learning
in Rural Areas

Once the continental empire of the United States was firmly established, the opportunity of the frontier quickly became the "rural problem" (Silver & DeYoung, 1986; cf. Cubberley, 1922). According to Cubberley (1922, p. 4), the rural problem was that "rural people and rural institutions have not changed rapidly enough to keep pace with the demands of the new civilization." Cubberley believed "the main single remedy which must be applied to the rural life problem is education. consists largely in a redirection of rural education itself" (Cubberley, 1922, p. 105).

Like Cubberley, contemporary observers conclude that rural people are too poor, illiterate, inflexible, and too lacking in leadership to confront modern reality (cf. Hobbs, 1987; Knutson & Fisher, 1988; Porter, 1989; Ross & Rosenfeld, 1987). In the current period of economic restructuring, therefore, education is once again promoted as the key to "revitalizing" rural life (e.g., Bloomquist, 1988; Brown & Deavers, 1987b; Hobbs, 1987, 1989; Knutson & Fisher, 1988; Rosenfeld, 1989; cf. Cubberley, 1922). In this view, education, reconceived as information and training, will empower rural communities to become more competitive.

Although most observers clearly understand that education is part of a larger social and economic context, many analyses lack a critical assessment of the influence of economic structures on rural education. Recent work both by neoclassical and political economists suggests the scope of the influence of economic structures. Political economists, however, generally stress the role of economic structures, whereas neoclassical economists generally stress the role of individual characteristics (Zachariah, 1985).

Individual Characteristics or Economic Structures?

Some researchers understand that individual characteristics such as poverty and unemployment (or poor school achievement and adult illiteracy) may serve an economically functional purpose, despite their deplorable nature. According to Tomaskovic-Devey (1987, p. 59), for example, personal "characteristics--age, gender, race, and education--do not cause poverty.

Rather, these are the characteristics used in the United States to allocate poverty" [original emphasis]. This view is neither new nor radical. Duncan (1968) made a similar point about discrimination against blacks.

According to this view, such characteristics as race (or place of residence) determine who must, as a result of the economy's need for poverty, actually live in poverty. These characteristics do not cause poverty, and there is nothing inherent in the attributes of white urban males (for example) that make them more valuable human beings than black rural women. A different sort of social organization might--with as slender a claim to reason--allocate poverty to white urban males.

Both neoclassical economists and political economists have operationalized structural features in analyses of the "dual labor market." Dual labor market theory entails comparison of the primary versus secondary labor market, in which the primary market pays higher wages, offers greater job security, and is dominated by larger ("core" or "monopolistic") enterprises. The secondary market offers lower wages, less security, and is dominated by smaller ("peripheral" or "competitive") enterprises. Studies of the dual labor market examine market segmentation at a microeconomic (regional or sectoral) level. Some of their studies examine, not the effects of individual characteristics, but the effects of economic structures (which may hypothetically allocate poverty to individuals with certain characteristics). According to Kalleberg (1989, p. 587) dual labor market studies are "particularly useful for linking phenomena at macro and micro levels of analysis."

For example, Stevens (1983), in an analysis of dual labor market employment in the Northwest timber industry, found that the 25,000 "peripheral" workers--those most likely to be affected by market volatility--did not behave rationally by the standards of macroeconomic theory. Staying with a job--which would help them accumulate human capital (Mincer, 1989)--was not economically productive for these workers. In fact, changing jobs frequently helped these workers maximize income. At the level of the workers' lived experience, economic structures elicited behavior that, though rational in the local context (where the dual labor market operates), appeared at the same time to be irrational from the perspective of human capital (a macroeconomic perspective that minimizes local conditions).

More broadly-based empirical research, predicated on the premise that economic structures affect issues relevant to quality of life (poverty, unemployment, equality of income distribution, educational attainment), indicates that the presence in a county of industries that represent the "core" (monopoly manufacturing industries for the most part: national firms with a local branch plant or division) and large family farms (as opposed to corporate and commercial farms) produce cumulative positive economic effects over time (Reif, 1987; cf. Bloomquist & Summers, 1988).

By contrast, the prevalence in rural counties of extractive industries (mining, agriculture generally, forestry, and fishing), state employment (education, social service, government), peripheral manufacturing and both large corporate and very small, part-time farming seems to have a negative effect on socioeconomic conditions over time (see, for example, Reif, 1987; Bloomquist & Summers, 1982; 1988; Tomaskovic-Devey, 1985, 1987).

Other research indicates that extractive industries and routine manufacturing (i.e., "peripheral" rather than "core" manufacturing) predominate in rural areas (Bender et al., 1985; Brown & Deavers, 1987a; Deavers & Brown, 1985; DeYoung, 1985; Rosenfeld et al., 1985, 1989). If the analyses of researchers like Lyson (1989), Reif (1987), and Tomaskovic-Devey (1985) are correct, then the poverty that characterizes rural life in many places is an effect of economic structure. Lyson (1989) calls for reform of the haphazard de facto economic development policies that destroy rural communities.

Such analyses as these suggest that the alternate hypotheses of political economy (in which the effects of economic structures are studied) do have merit in comparison to the hypotheses of neoclassical economics (in which individual skills, attitudes, and access top information figure so prominently). In particular, dual labor-market analyses have the advantage of looking beneath the surface of the macroeconomy (that is, the national economy as a whole) to the underlying reality of regional or sectoral economic structures.

Macroeconomics as Fiction

One of the most original economic critiques of recent decades has been made by Jane Jacobs (Hill, 1988). Jacobs' critique incorporates features of dependency theory and dual labor market theory (e.g., the city as locations of core activities and structures, and rural areas as locations of peripheral activities and structures), of capitalist ideology (e.g., the value of innovation in development, the importance of wise investment), and of politicized environmentalism (e.g., the importance of small-scale, mixed-use city planning and neighborhood preservation). As a result, Jacobs cannot be neatly classified as a radical, liberal, or conservative (Hill, 1988).

Jacobs (1984) is most sharply critical of what she considers to be the economic fiction of the nation state. Macroeconomics--upon which national policy decisions largely rest--treats the nation as the unit of analysis, but according to Jacobs, national and international data obscure the much greater variety of economic relations that exist within each nation. The larger the nation, the more it functions as an empire, and the greater the variety of contradictory economic conditions within it (Jacobs, 1984).

According to Jacobs, macroeconomic analysis--especially in large nations or empires--actually obscures the structures and processes that create economic vigor. She believes that urban economies, not national economies, are the sources of economic growth. Macroeconomics is thus built on false premises. Instead of analyzing national economic data, economists should investigate economic relations among cities and among cities and the rural areas that they dominate (Jacobs, 1984).

Jacobs cautions that empire (she uses both the United States and the Soviet Union as examples) impedes economic development in the long-run. Periods of growth and geographic expansion incorporate vast areas that have different economic needs and different roles to play in the economic development of the empire. Later, such differences invite comparisons and pleas for equal treatment to the central government, which typically responds in two ways. First, it seeks to maintain its empire by force (often how it was constructed in the first place). Second, it seeks to

stem social unrest by transfer payments of various sorts intended to ameliorate the worst inequalities (cf. Dubin & Reid, 1988; Lyson 1989).

Jacobs (1984) calls both responses "transactions of decline." Transactions of decline are nonproductive economic expenses, since neither programs of transfer payments nor militarism promote economic development (cf. Dubin & Reid, 1988; Melman, 1985). Transactions of decline bring about economic stagnation as the empire becomes consumed in an attempt to ensure its continued existence. According to Jacobs, it is ultimately a hopeless struggle.

Jacobs (1984) provides numerous examples from history to illustrate her points. Recent events in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and Canada, however, also illustrate Jacobs' points. Whether the difficulties these nations confront will be resolved so as to preserve their existing empires is not clear, but it is clear that the threats to their national sovereignty are real. It is equally clear that "transactions of decline" (particularly the maintenance of a standing military force) do play a role in amplifying threats to imperial unity.

The Economic Marginality of Rural America

Economic marginality is, with respect to the economy as a whole, the structural analog of poverty with respect to the experience of individuals. Economic marginality entails the questionable profitability of an occupation or enterprise, and is usually associated with routine production that is no longer the site of major new economic development (e.g., Barkley, Keith, & Smith, 1989; Jacobs, 1984; Lyson, 1989).

As Daniel Bell, one of the pioneers of post-industrial analyses, noted some time ago, a key feature of post-industrial society is the continuing obsolescence of labor, particularly labor"construed as the sale of the time of proletarian workers of undifferentiated--and increasingly devalued--skills (Bell, 1973). The obsolescence of labor is the progressive replacement of labor by nonhuman capital (plant, machinery, and other fixed assets). In the process of obsolescence, each remaining worker in the enterprise becomes responsible for a greater amount of capital and for a greater amount of output. As an enterprise matures, then, capitalization increases, worker

productivity increases, costs (and prices) per unit of output drop, and eventually profitability falls to a marginal level, all things being equal (Wright, 1979). This is the process by which marginal economic enterprises come into being--those in which workers are few and profits are comparatively low (cf. Lyson, 1989).

It may seem that marginal enterprises serve no productive purpose, but this impression ignores the significance of economic structure and function. As an enterprise becomes progressively more marginal, it can be integrated into more profitable enterprises, either by the corporation that owns it (perhaps as part of planned diversification), or by another corporation interested in diversifying its operations (to which the owning corporation can sell the enterprise). It can also be relocated to areas (e.g., in the third world) where labor costs are much less than they are in rural America.

In an age when human knowledge becomes embodied in fixed capital (i.e., machines controlled by computers), labor obsolescence may well include the replacement of labor (or human capital) by the knowledge codified in machines (cf. Weiner, 1950). The wages of the remaining workers need not decline, since overall labor costs will have been minimized, and wages tend to be relatively good in highly capitalized industries (Heilbroner & Thurow, 1985; McGranahan, 1987; Williams, 1988).

When such a technological change affects the occupational structure of rural areas, Jacobs (1984) refers to it as a clearance. Workers are "cleared" from the process of production, to their detriment unless they can find another occupation. Rural workers are also cleared in the sense that if other occupations are not available, they abandon the rural area for the city. Jacobs (1984) notes that clearances, which result from technological innovation (in agriculture or mining, for example), and abandonment need not occur simultaneously. Abandonment can occur without a technological incentive, as among peasants who abandon subsistence farming because they mistakenly believe a better life is available in urban areas, or as among extractive workers who move to the city during market "busts."

As an economic base of routine production, marginal enterprises contribute to overall economic production and development. Corporate accounting departments, for example, generate

no profit, but firms do not therefore eliminate them. Marginal enterprises--if they cannot be eliminated--become, like accounting departments, part of the cost of doing business. Not only need they not be profitable, they may necessarily be operated at a loss, and, depending on the corporation's overall structure, a loss may offer certain advantages. In fact, public policy usually provides help--often substantial--to marginal enterprises (e.g., Duncan & Duncan, 1983; Stevens, 1983).

This impression is confirmed empirically by Turner & Starnes (1976), who report that transfer payments to corporations and to the wealthy in general far exceed those to individuals and the poor. That is, transactions of decline should not be thought of as the economic drain of social welfare payments, but rather as "wealthfare" payments to producers, whose operation of marginal industries contributes vital resources to the empire (cf. Turner & Starnes, 1976).

In general, industries best suited to rural America are those "with routine technology and established markets" (Lyson, 1989; McGranahan, 1987, p. 3; cf. Barkley et al., 1989). These are precisely the sorts of industries described here as marginal enterprises.

Recent empirical descriptions demonstrate how much life in rural America has changed even since 1950 or 1960 (Bender et al., 1985; Brown & Deavers, 1987a; McGranahan, Hession, Hines, & Jordon, 1986; Rosenfeld et al., 1985, 1989; Stephens, 1988). Agricultural production can no longer be taken to be the characteristic rural enterprise, as it was in the past (e.g., Cubberley, 1922). Other industries are now equally important to the economic life of rural areas.

Behind this emerging diversity, however, lies increased specialization, as the work of Bender et al. (1985) particularly suggests. These researchers (employed by the Department of Agriculture) developed an 8-part typology of nonmetropolitan counties: farming-dependent, mining-dependent, manufacturing-dependent, retirement-dependent, government services, federal lands, persistent poverty, and unclassified.

Perhaps half of all rural counties have an economic base in natural resource "extraction." Making a liberal estimate of duplicated counties, perhaps 1460 counties (or fully 70% of classified nonmetropolitan counties) depend either on extractive industries or manufacturing.

If mining-, farming-, and timber-dependent counties are considered to be the extractive sector of rural economies, then rural specialization can be seen as a trend even within a single sector. Since 1969 the number of counties in these categories has increased by 156%. Of this increase, 20% is attributable to mining, 2% to timber, and 77% to farming (cf. Weber, Castle, & Shriver, 1987). This specialization has developed even as services have become the fastest-growing sector of the economy generally.

Rural areas, in short, seem to render specialized service to the national economy by serving as a site for specialized production by marginal enterprises that provision the nation with energy, minerals, food and fiber, and simple manufactured goods. Productivity in such industries is rising, and labor inputs are falling. Rural residents have a long history of underemployment and low participation in the labor market (McGranahan, 1987). To an unmeasured degree, this history contributes to their acceptance of low wages and periods of unemployment and underemployment as a condition of life (Cobb, 1982).

Analysts agree that a number of problems must be confronted in the future. The strategy most frequently endorsed by educators and rural development experts (e.g., Bender et al., 1985; Brown & Deavers, 1987a; Hobbs, 1987, 1989; Lyson, 1989; Sher, 1987) is to improve human capital (or human resources) in rural areas. Most observers appear to believe that more education and training will improve rural socioeconomic conditions, an issue of causality that the preceding analysis draws into question. Observers like Zachariah (1985, p. 21), for example, warn that available evidence indicates that:

> it is not possible, ever again, to portray formal education as Atlas shouldering the burden of transforming individuals in order to accelerate development. It is now doubtful whether formal education is two-faced Janus, with the ability to learn from the mistakes of corporate capitalism as well as state socialism and wisely create a new society of the future.

The Limits of Neoclassical Analyses

The recommendation to improve human capital can, however, be understood in light of popular critiques of neoclassical economics. Bowles, Gordon, and Weisskopf (1984, p. 5) note the essential assumption: Whereas the economy is a creation of people, and its basic relationships are social relationships, neoclassical economics "has adopted the view that the economy runs like a machine, a clockwork mechanism in perpetual synchrony." In neoclassical economics, social relations are not an object of inquiry. As a result, human beings--creatures of culture and ideology that they are--have a questionable place in neoclassical economics.

Human capital theory, however, integrates human beings into the neoclassical analysis as the location of economically productive skills and knowledge. Its interpretation of the knowledge, skills, and experience of human beings as capital is significant because the free movement of private capital is perhaps the key feature of capitalism (cf. Smith, 1960/1776). The free movement of labor is also a feature of capitalism. Capital moves as a powerful mass, however, whereas labor moves as comparatively powerless individuals.

In the neoclassical analysis, rural areas are geographic sites that provide for the development of certain utilities that should ultimately benefit the national economy. Likewise, rural people are merely sites of the skills, knowledge, and experience that apparently contribute to national economic growth. Neoclassical analysis is, therefore, a process of reification (turning humans into things). That is, people become things (sites) in which development, directed from outside the people themselves, takes place. Skills, too, are viewed as things that are transplanted to people-as-things, rather than being presented as the legacy of culture that they really are. Instead of being actors (subjects of culture), people are, in this view, passive recipients (objects of development); skills, too, tend to be viewed as static objects of strictly utilitarian value. The values and culture of a people who chance to occupy a particular territory are immaterial to development, in this view. If economic development does not occur (or, as in the case of the national economy, is perceived to lag) neoclassical economics may recommend the improvement of human capital as one possibility.

Because neoclassical economics does not inquire about the role of social relations, and because with human capital it separates skills and knowledge as a factor of production separate from individual human beings, it can view particular human beings as impediments to economic development. The quickest remedy to economic stagnation or decline, therefore, is not education but replacement of the existing capital stock. Displaced rural citizens can be "retooled" to serve the aims of the national economy. By treating human beings as a capital stock, neoclassical economics can "free" workers of the (rural) places to which they are "irrationally" attached.

The neoclassical clockwork comes apart, however, when economics seeks to investigate regional, ethnic, and gender issues (Bowles et al., 1984; Kalleberg, 1989; Williams, 1988). Pottinger (1987) showed how a Reagan-era Presidential Commission, asked to identify barriers to economic development, overlooked the relevant skills and knowledge immediately available in a depressed American Indian economy, and reported that deficient human capital was the chief barrier to development. Pottinger demonstrated that there were already too few jobs to make use of the available skills of local people. Duncan (1986) makes a similar point about the limited employment prospects in central Appalachia and the attraction of cities: Lack of jobs, not a deficient workforce, keep people in poverty. Both Lyson (1989) and Sher (1988) believe that the creation of good jobs must be given a priority that de facto rural development policies have never acknowledged. Both these observers note that economic justice is the foundation of economic development.

Without a view of economic structures and social relations, neoclassical analysis, if honest, can report only great "diversity" (Zachariah, 1985; cf. Bender et al., 1985). The findings of such research, however, tend to support the inference that the socially created structures that govern the macroeconomic clockwork require the economic marginality of rural areas (cf. Bender et al., 1985; Brown & Deavers, 1987a; Weber et al., 1987).

Education for Rural Life

Because education in the United States has attempted to construct itself as (in Frderick W. Taylor's phrase) a "one best system," most rural schools resemble urban schools much more than

they did even 30 years ago (Cremin, 1961; Katz, 1971; Spring, 1986; Tyack, 1974). A number of observers with differing views on education now agree that efficiently run, standardized schools aim to develop rural students' human capital (e.g., Deaton & McNamara, 1984; DeYoung, 1989; Meyer, Tyack, Nagel, & Gordon, 1979; Nachtigal, 1982; Sher, 1987). Such an educational aim seeks to create rural citizens who are willing--with little complaint--to take their alloted roles in the national economy. Deaton and McNamara (1984, p. 23), for example assert:

> At the national level, education is viewed as a means of developing good citizens who are politically responsible and in whom particular values can be inculcated in the educational process... Education ... enable[s] individuals to be responsive to changing macroeconomic forces. This may entail such phenomena as spatial resettlement and occupational adjustments to structural changes in the economy.

"Spatial resettlement" and "occupational adjustment" are neutral terms for relocation and unemployment--"clearances" and "abandonment in Jacobs' (1984) less neutral analysis. In other words, such an education prepares rural students to accept the increasingly marginal role reserved for rural areas in the national economy of the American empire.

A number of related observations are in order at this juncture. First, learning is a process that is fundamentally different from investment human capital. Second, however important material conditions may be in shaping the experiences of the workplace, the place of culture and ideology in the classroom is paramount (cf. Giroux, 1983). Third, the value of education is not limited to, or even best conceived as, its relationship to earnings (Bell, 1973). Fourth, the institutional role of schooling is contested ground, so that an alternative view of rural education need not resolve whether or not the ultimate institutional role of schooling is to legitimate the existing inequity of the social order or to contribute to the construction of a new one (Carnoy & Levin, 1985). A final observation derives from the other four: Rural teachers have a choice about how they will deal with the issues of culture and ideology within their own classrooms (Keizer, 1988; Wigginton, 1985).

Culture and ideology pertain to the way in which individuals and groups make sense of the world that surrounds them (Bell, 1973, 1976). A serious cultural problem of the emerging post-industrial world is that it blurs the distinction between information, knowledge, and understanding

(Bell, 1973; Wiener, 1950). Facts are thought to "speak for themselves," and the possession of facts (information) is equated with knowledge. When learning becomes the acquisition of information (as in a curriculum and instructional routine that teaches only basic skills for a vocational purpose), education is debased.

The debasement draws education into a wider cycle of cultural devolution: Science devolves to technology; culture devolves to consumption; and education devolves to mere experience (Bell, 1973, 1976). In the reductionist modality of knowledge-as-information, even the distinction between knowledge and information has vanished. Learning becomes a kind of unmediated transfer of information, unmediated not only in its directness, but in the absence of an instructional authority. The construction of meaning disappears as an aim of education, since it is neither information nor skill.

Bell (1976) points out that the cultural weakness of capitalism lies in the way it separates culture and technical skill. Culture is debased and becomes a realm in which the meaning of literature, history, or art is a matter of subjective taste and private pleasure. Complex considerations of taste, judgment, and meaning are not simply viewed as too difficult for ordinary students, they are seen to be inappropriate topics of classroom discourse, a potential violation of an individual's privacy.

This trend trivializes the humanities, which are the source of the values that not only sustain society but that permit social progress (Bell, 1976; cf. Wigginton, 1985). The humanities are problematic in the context of vocationalism because--unlike enterprise training--they do not imply some immediate course of action (cf. Hobbs, 1989, p. 11). Technical skill, which does imply an immediate practical effect, becomes the focus of training and economic advancement, however weak or questionable the empirical connection between it and economic development below the macroeconomic level (e.g., for blacks, women, or rural residents).

Rural life and learning, however, may have another role than the instrumental one actually accorded them by the macroeconomic structure and the policymakers so concerned with America's economic international dominance. The features of rural life--solitude, the imminence of the natural

world, and kinship with neighbors, for the most part--may have an enduring intellectual and ethical significance for the American culture as a whole, which is rooted in a rural experience.

The isolation and imminence of the natural world in rural areas provide a context for the life of the mind, which has little scope beyond professionalism in the urban context. Intellectuals have historically looked to rural life as the inspiration for the development of a strong pastoral theme in American thought (Jacobs, 1984; Sample, 1989; Theobald, 1989). More generally, the search for virtue is in America bound up with stewardship of the earth (e.g., Berry, 1978, 1984, 1986; Nearing & Nearing, 1970). The rural tradition embodies an ethical ideal (an ideology) that encompasses individual, community, and nature. Schooling in rural America might embody such an ethic--which relates to concern for the social and natural environment as well as for the intellect--better than it has.

This alternative entails the preservation and construction of meaning and reflection in a developed culture that is notable for its anti-intellectualism (Hofstadter, 1963; Howley, 1987; cf. Storr, 1988). Rural schools, which have been instruments of empire-building, have done little to look at their mission in this way, and it might be argued that rural schools as they are cannot begin to carry out such a mission. The material conditions of rural and economic marginality seem almost insurmountable.

Is it, however, coincidental that a rural teacher has written one of the most eloquent statements of why the creation of meanings, not vocationalism or the development of human capital, warrants the work of the schools? Perhaps not. Keizer (1988, p. 68) writes,

> For consider, if the real world is as full of injustice, waste, and woe as it appears to be, and school has no other purpose than to prepare young people to man and woman the machinery of the real world, then schools are pernicious institutions. They serve to perpetuate rather than remedy evils. We would do as well to burn as to maintain a school that does no more than mirror and foreshadow the real world.

This view pits rural education as cultural act (the preservation and extension of culture) against education as an economic end (global domination and integration). The life of the mind works on the

appreciation and making of fine distinctions and on the examination of contradictions (cf. Bell's "discordant knowledge").

If Bell's (1973, 1976) analyses of post-industrial society and the cultural contradictions of capitalism are correct, an education that fails to equip most students with an intimate knowledge of their culture and with the tools of judgment and reason--so they can confront the significant questions of human existence--will surely fail them and their various communities badly. Rural schools can and should contribute to the most essential mission of education: the nurture of minds that construct meaning.

It is past time to reconsider the aims of rural education: Educators should learn that schools cannot directly change the social and economic structures in which they are embedded. Their mission, instead, should be to help students encounter the enduring human questions and to construct the valid meanings that are the only route to the creation of a more just society and a more productive world.

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